

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 07989 261033Z

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ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T TEL AVIV 7989

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, IS, LE
SUBJECT: SITUATION ON NORTHERN ISRAELI BORDER AS OF NOV. 25, 1976

REF: TEL AVIV 7906

1. AARMA AND OFFICIAL DOD VISITORS TOURED GOLAN HEIGHTS
AND THE LEBANESE BORDER VICINITY METULLA NOVEMBER 24 -
25, 1976.

2. THROUGHOUT THE ROAD TRIP AND VISIT WITH IDF UNITS ON
GOLAN AARMA DID NOT NOTICE ANYTHING BUT "BUSINESS AS
USUAL." THERE WERE NO INDICATIONS OF ANY INCREASED IDF
ALERT, NO CHANGE IN THE TRAINING AND MAINTENANCE PATTERN,
NO COMBAT LOADING OF VEHICLES AS SEEN IN SOME PREVIOUS
ALERTS, NO MOVEMENT OF TANK TRANSPORTERS OR UNUSUAL MOVE-
MENT OF EQUIPMENT, ETC. THE RESERVE UNITS OBSERVED MORE
THAN A WEEK AGO DURING THE MOBILIZATION ALERT WERE NOT IN
EVIDENCE. IN SHORT, THE SITUATION APPEARED NORMAL.

3. DURING THE VISIT TO THE GOLAN, PARTY WAS BRIEFED AT
THE DIVISION HEADQUARTERS BY THE DEPUTY DIVISION
COMMANDER, THIRTY SIXTH ARMORED DIVISION, COLONEL
SHILO. COLONEL SHILO APOLOGIZED FOR THE ABSENCE OF
THE DIVISION COMMANDER BY SAYING THAT DUTY CALLED HIM
TO BE SOMEWHERE ELSE. DAO DOES NOT ATTACH ANY SPECIAL
SIGNIFICANCE TO THE ABSENCE OF THE DIVISION COMMANDER.

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 TEL AV 07989 261033Z

BASED ON PREVIOUS TRIPS WITH VISITORS, IT IS NOT

UNUSUAL FOR THE DEPUTY OR OTHER OFFICER TO STEP IN DURING AN UNEXPECTED COMMITMENT OF THE COMMANDER.

4. AARMA HAD OPPORTUNITY TO MOTOR THROUGH THE MOST IMPORTANT TERRAIN ON THE GOLAN AND VISITED AN ARTILLERY BATTERY OF M109A1 155MM HOWITZERS CONDUCTING LIVE FIRING AS WELL AS A TANK COMPANY PULLING NORMAL MAINTENANCE. ADDITIONALLY, PARTY WAS TAKEN TO THE HERMONIT (33 11N; 35 48E) AND AN OP/STRONGPOINT AT ABOUT THE FOLLOWING LOCATION 33 04N; 35 50E. PARTY ALSO HAD LUNCH WITH AN ARTILLERY BATTALION'S OFFICERS, THE COORDINATOR OF ARTILLERY ON THE GOLAN (DIVARTY CDR, LTC(P) ZOAR AHARON) AND BG NATKE NIR, CHIEF OF STAFF, NORTHERN COMMAND. THROUGHOUT THE VISIT, NO UNUSUAL ACTIVITY WAS DETECTED.

5. BG NIR INDICATED NO UNDUE CONCERN ABOUT THE PRESENT SITUATION IN LEBANON BUT DID SAY THAT THE COMMAND IS WATCHING IT CAREFULLY. WHEN DISCUSSING THE REINFORCEMENT OF THE NORTHERN BORDER (LEBANESE) BY TWO BATTALIONS OF INFANTRY AND TWO TANK COMPANIES (REFTEL), HE INDICATED THAT HE WAS FRUSTRATED BY THE DIFFERENCE IN RESPONSIVENESS TO MOVEMENT ORDERS BY SUBORDINATE UNITS FROM HIS PRESENT LEVEL OF ASSIGNMENT. HE SAID THAT AS A DIVISION OR BRIGADE COMMANDER HE COULD TELL ONE OF HIS BRIGADES OR BATTALIONS TO MOVE AND THE RESPONSE WAS ALMOST IMMEDIATE. HOWEVER, HE STATED IT TOOK HIM THREE AND ONE HALF DAYS TO MOVE THE UNITS THAT REINFORCED THE NORTHERN BORDER INTO THEIR NEW LOCATIONS. DAO CONSIDERS THAT BG NIR OBVIOUSLY INCLUDED PLANNING TIME AND COORDINATION IN ADDITION TO THE ACTUAL MOVEMENT OF UNITS AND THEIR INCORPORATION INTO THE LINE OF THE BORDER.

6. PARTY VISITED THE BORDER FENCE ON THE ISRAELI/ LEBANESE BORDER IN THE VICINITY OF METULLA AND DID NOT OBSERVE ANY UNUSUAL ACTIVITY NOR HEAR ANY ARTILLERY OR MORTAR FIRE. HOWEVER, THE WEATHER WAS VERY FOGGY SO LONG RANGE OBSERVATION WAS RESTRICTED.

7. AT ABOUT 0600Z, NOVEMBER 26, A BATTALION OF M109A1 155MM HOWITZERS ON TANK TRANSPORTERS WAS OBSERVED
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 TEL AV 07989 261033Z

PARKED BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD VICINITY HERZLIA PITUACH (33 10N; 34 48E) HEADING NORTH. DAO COULD NOT DETERMINE IF THE UNIT WAS REGULAR OR RESERVE AS ONLY THE EQUIPMENT WAS OBSERVED.

8. COMMENT: IN RESPONSE TO A FLURRY OF PRESS SPECULATION TO EFFECT THAT IDF HAD REINFORCED LEBANESE BORDER WITH FORCES IN EXCESS OF THE TWO BATTALIONS OF

INFANTRY AND TWO TANK COMPANIES OF WHICH MG GAZIT, IDF DMI, HAD INFORMED DATT (REFTEL), DAO AGAIN CHECKED WITH IDF LATE ON NOVEMBER 24. IDF REP FIRMLY STATED THAT THERE HAD NOT BEEN ANY ADDITIONAL REINFORCEMENTS. WE BELIEVE PRESS SPECULATION BASED UPON SUPPORT ELEMENTS MOVING TO TACTICAL REINFORCEMENT UNITS. WEATHER IS VERY BAD AND ADDITIONAL TENTING, WINTER/WET WEATHER GEAR, KITCHENS, ETC. ARE REQUIRED. THE MOVEMENT OF ARTILLERY UNIT, IF IT CONTINUES TO NORTH FROM CURRENT CENTRAL ISRAEL ROUTE, COULD BE ARTILLERY SUPPORT REINFORCEMENT OF INFANTRY BATTALIONS OR COULD BE GOLAN REPLACEMENT FOR ARTILLERY WHICH MAY HAVE BEEN SHIFTED TO LEBANESE BORDER. THEREFORE, AT PRESENT, EMBASSY CONSIDERS THAT TACTICAL REINFORCEMENTS IS AS REPORTED REFTEL. ARMA WILL MEET WITH SENIOR IDF OFFICERS AFTERNOON AND EVENING NOVEMBER 26 AND WILL REPORT ON ANY ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OBTAINED.
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